



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GC45 GCE03 Supporting Toward 2035 for Summer 2025**

True Document Date: August 9, 2025

**Origin: General Council Executive**

## **1. What is the issue? Why is it important?**

In the development, adoption and implementation of the Strategic Plan (2021) with its [Call and Vision](#) and [strategic operation plan](#), the Executive of the General Council was committed to seeking to reverse the narrative of decline that is so prevalent in the life of the church. There is no doubt that church has lived experience of decline, and the data supports this. The Executive Leaders have committed to foster a climate of data informed decision making and to lead from the future.

A recent research project comparing the statistics from 1992 and 2023 and projecting out to 2035 has given validation to anecdotal experience of decline and garnered important new insights. The data demonstrates the urgent need for intervention—analysis, vision, and strategy—to enable a different and better future to emerge Toward 2035.

The possible interventions are not about structural change, but about a change in imagination and an exercise of the influence and authority of the regional councils in partnership with the denominational council. It will require a whole church vision and strategy, intentionality, additional resources, and a risky boldness.

We are reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 3: 12 ESV) "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold." It is possible to intervene towards preserving and growing resilient and inspired communities of faith as we look toward 2035. This requires denominational commitment and collaboration on the development of vision and strategy, based in strong analysis of the data, and active experimentation and learning. This proposal allows for

experiments in intervention.

## 2. What is happening now?

In November, 2024, the Executive Leaders worked with data projections to envision possible interventions to change that trajectory. The Executive of the General Council joined that conversation and encouraged the General Secretary to prioritize the work identified by staff.

The Executive returned to this topic in March (7-9, 2025) when the Executive directed the General Secretary to work with the regional councils to develop and articulate a strategy and an implementation plan including but not limited to piloting initiatives and to develop an engagement plan for a church-wide conversation on *Toward 2035*.

Regional councils have started the conversation in their context. A letter introducing *Toward 2035* has been sent throughout the church. A discussion resource for the church's use is in production.

With the church engaging this topic, the Executive of the General Council is recommending an extension of permission to experiment that was granted by the 44th General Council in its decision:

- That the 44th General Council, 2022, in response to GCE05 Living into the Strategic Plan, encourage regional councils and communities of faith to experiment with new ministry initiatives, provided such initiatives are within the bounds of the authority of the regional council and community of faith as set out in the Basis of Union, and on terms agreed to by the regional council and the community of faith. Such permission will remain in effect until the convening of the 45th General Council at which time the General Secretary will report the results of the experimentation for information and further action as appropriate.

**Carried**

## 3. What is the recommendation?

The Executive of the General Council requests that the 45th General Council:

- a. Extend GCE05 (2022) *Living into the Strategic Plan* for another triennium (2025-2028); and
- b. Include the General Council as an additional venue of experimentation.

## 4. Background information?

In 2006, the 39th General Council affirmed a call to the church in which it prayed that God would “propel” the church into God’s future “rooted in the richness of the past.” **(Call to Purpose)** From its inception, the church has sought to be responsive to the reality of its context, seeking to embody its understanding of the gospel. The changing context of both the church and the Canadian society and the global community is requiring that the church commit again to being responsive to the reality of its contexts.

Beginning in 2009 at the 40th General Council, the church began a process of seeking to clarify its purpose and vision. The church understood that it needed clarity of purpose and a nimbleness to not just be reactive but to be responsive to emerging realities. The church began to experiment – Candidacy Pathways, a review of Theological formation, the establishment of experimental ministry opportunities through the EDGE network, and of course the establishment of The Comprehensive Review Task group. The Task group report and recommendations were brought to the 42nd General Council, meeting in Newfoundland. The Task group recommended some fundamental changes to the structure and processes of the church. The proposed changes came into effect in 2019, and within a year were impacted by the Global COVID epidemic. The church has continued to experience significant decline and financial challenges.

With the General Council’s adoption of the Strategic Plan in 2021 with its Call and Vision and the General Council Office’s strategic operational plan, it has become more and more evident for the need for other strategies to enable the church’s future. The recent data research project – comparing trends between 1992 and 2023 and projecting out to 2035--has not only shown that the United Church is in decline but that there are opportunities, if we are intentional, to intervene to find a robust future. At the same time the data highlights both existing churches that are growing and the presence of an increasing number of emerging churches.

Toward 2035 is a sharpening of the current strategic operational plan and is intended to be an intentional response to some of the challenges facing the church. It calls for a sustained and deeper collaboration between the denominational council and the regional councils. It is an invitation to the church to take up a new way of imagining what it means to be church in this time and place, to experience the promise of a “future and a hope” (Isaiah).

## 5. How does this proposal help us live into our church's commitments on equity?

In 2025 it is estimated that about 5-10% of The United Church of Canada reflects the diversity of the whole country, in regard to race and ethnicity. The initial response to the invitations extended through the growth initiative to migrant and francophone communities has been nothing short of astounding.

As well as potentially assisting with other forms of strengthened invitation, this investment potentially contributes resources to work towards more fulsome support of these emerging communities, as well as supporting existing communities of faith who are growing through welcoming and engaging with newcomer Christians that God has brought into their neighbourhoods.

### **For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- ☐ Disagree and forwarding to the General Council
- ☐ Take no action at this time

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: [GCinfo@united-church.ca](mailto:GCinfo@united-church.ca)

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